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## Penn Ave. Building Takes On New Life

Nearly two years ago, a pair of architects tramped through a rundown three-story building at 318 Penn Ave., in the midst of what is now a wholesale block. It took no small amount of imagination for them to recognize, in popular parlance, the building's "possibilities." By July of 1982, John Palumbo and Tom Horlacher, partners in a rapidly growing new business, had purchased it. That their exciting plans for the structure are now materializing is not surprising; vision, after all, is the stuff of which architecture is made.

With the deed to 318 Penn Ave. came a fascinating bit of Scranton's history — also not surprising since both John and Tom have long been committed to preservation of the city's architectural heritage. They learned that their building, which would be developed to house not only new offices for the mushrooming firm, but also law offices and a private residence on the upper levels, had once been a nightspot — a kind of local counterpart of Harlem's famous Cotton Club. As the renovation progressed, they would discover fragments of the building's lively past, including a worn down dance floor and an intriguing, if faded, mural, the latter unfortunately too obscured by time, neglect, and the elements to warrant saving.

The press of other business was significant; the firm was deep into projects totalling over \$15 million in construction value. Nevertheless, their remaining professional energy went into developing a concept for the renovation of their new acquisition. Basic to the design was the idea of marrying the old and the new.

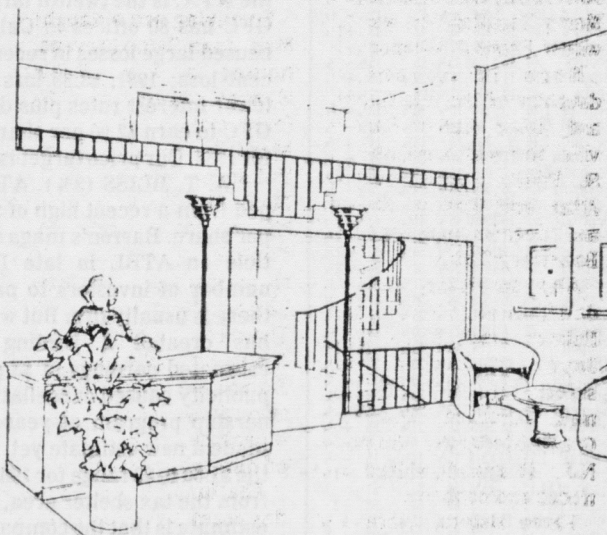
Palumbo & Horlacher had recently completed a project of similar flavor — renovation of new quarters for N. B. Levy Jewelers in the old Third National Bank Building on Wyoming Avenue. That had required adaptive reuse of the first floor of the 1910 Greek Revival building. Many of the existing features, as well as Art Deco architectural detailing from the former store, were incorporated into the design. The architects would attempt much of the same with 318 Penn Ave., but in addition, this new project would be a landmark in the city's revitalization effort.

There had been years of citywide discussion on viable reuses for declining commercial properties. John and Tom were prepared, however, to pioneer the effort; together they produced the first plan for complete adaptation of 318 Penn Ave. for mixed (i.e., commercial and residential) occupancy, utilizing all four floors of the building. Comments: Tom Horlacher, "We hope this project will serve as a model and inspiration to others considering development within the downtown area."

Another important "first" in the design was a plan for creative reuse of the existing sidewalk vault, a concept which won the enthusiastic support of the city. As the design evolved, it became clear that opening up the storage vault would allow for complete utilization of the basement level, and would enhance the exterior appearance of the building as well. "The con-



CREATIVE REUSE — New offices of Palumbo and Horlacher, Inc., an architectural firm, at 318 Penn Ave., give new life to an old building.



STRIKING DESIGN — Artist's rendering of reception area and mezzanine designed by Palumbo and Horlacher, Inc., their growing architectural firm.

cept is actually quite fascinating," says John Palumbo. "While many downtown commercial structures have access to sidewalk vaults, we can find no precedent for opening one up and putting it to new use. Although we plan to utilize ours as a lightwell and showcase for public art, eventually another entire level of commercial activity could be developed in the business district."

The architects heralded completion of their design and the onset of construction last spring with an unconventional "before" party for friends and business associates, held on the gutted first floor beneath a "canopy" provided by the decaying pressed metal ceiling, also unfortunately beyond salvaging. There was a rare charm to the event, a feeling of stepping back in time which sparked excitement about the

building's future. Curiosity will be satisfied late in the spring of this year, as the project comes to fruition with an "after" celebration of a much different variety.

The architectural offices will occupy the first floor of 318 Penn Ave., together with a newly constructed mezzanine made possible by lowering the first floor and taking advantage of the existing high ceiling.

On the first floor are a spacious conference room, reception area, and work area. Behind the reception area, a spiral staircase leads upstairs to the executive offices and downstairs to Palumbo & Horlacher's interior design division, which is headed by Susan Peters. There the former storage vault has been transformed; a glass wall looks out on the ingenious mini sculpture garden, visible from the sidewalk above and enclosed by an iron rail.

The interior design of the offices will provide a striking contrast to the somewhat subdued "townhouse" flavor of the exterior. The focal point of the first floor is the conference room, whose entry will be marked by a pair of brilliantly lacquered, oversized doors. While colors in the mezzanine-level executive offices are subdued grey tones, the main conference room will be done in striking shades of mauve and purple.

At the center of the conference room plan is an etched glass table, set on four lacquered columns. All of the furniture, in fact, has been designed by Palumbo & Horlacher, and much of it is lacquered. The hardware and columnar lighting have also been custom designed.

Since the Palumbo & Horlacher project was initiated, other development is now taking place in the 300 block of Penn Avenue, and more is rumored to be on the horizon. And just one block away, new construction — The Forum, IBM, Northeastern Bank's corporate headquarters — provide an obvious contrast to the concept of reusing older structures. Yet both approaches fit in quite comfortably with Downtown Scranton's slow but steady movement toward revitalization. And that movement has at its heart the Palumbo & Horlacher vision: saving the best of the past to build a more exciting future for the present generation of Scrantonians, and for those to follow.

and back -- not bad for 71, I would say." SRP: "I'll say. I hope I can do the same when I'm 71." I then went up to the attic and got several more boxes of books & papers. Not about furniture it; I believe I have just about all my books and papers here & now I will sort through them all and get my act together, as they say. Dinner: HRP & WSP had lamb chops; I had bacon. HRP knows that I dislike lamb and suggested the thick-cut bacon, which was delicious. We also had: mixed oriental vegetables, cottage cheese, macaroni & cheese, sweet potatoes & cucumber salad. A molded yellow (no it's jello) salad with nuts and fruit cocktail in it. Yellow, yellow — why not. Why not indeed.

HRP found this article on Tom Horlacher and brought it to my attention after we dined. We three sat in various corners of the living room and read the Sunday paper -- very comfortable moment.

at one point I put down the section I was looking at and discovered that WSP & HRP were each hidden behind a wide-open double page of the paper. No television was also on -- we were each involved in the paper.